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Action and More Action

*The Big Book tells us time and again
you have to give it away to keep it*

THE ONE THING that pops into my mind most often when I think of the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous is the incredible number of times it mentions giving this program away to keep it.

This month, I am celebrating my sixth AA birthday, and I've made a decision to pick up the Big Book daily and read something to strengthen my sobriety. The treasures that I'm finding are very rewarding.

I like the way Bill and Dr. Bob, co-founders of AA, carried the message to the third member. On page 186, they say, "We have a program whereby we think we can stay sober. Part of that program is that we take it to someone else, that needs it and wants it." This cleared up a misconception that I've heard at several AA meetings: "AA is for those that want it, not for those that need it." In fact, I was guilty of saying that a number of times until I read Dr. Bob's story. He says on page 180, "I spend a great

deal of time passing on what I learned to others who want and need it badly."

Twelfth-stepping has always been one of AA's attractions to me. When I bought the Big Book, my first week in AA, I remember turning to the chapter "Working With Others," reading and rereading it, and dreaming that some day I might be able to help someone with an alcoholic problem. I am aware that not too many members care to go out on Twelfth Step calls. One of the reasons I hear is "I gave up after a few tries. I guess they weren't ready yet." What if Bill and Dr. Bob had given up? Where would we be now? The chapter "A Vision for You" tells how the early AAs experienced a few distressing failures but knew they must help other alcoholics if they wanted to remain sober.

I'm so grateful to know that God has chosen me to help carry the message to alcoholics. When I was drink-

ing, I was in a wreck that totaled my car. The damage was so bad that my right front wheel wound up next to me in the front seat. There was no room in the car for anyone else to survive, yet my life was spared. I am another miracle among many in this beautiful Fellowship of miracles.

I keep involved in the AA program, trying to give back a little of what I have received so freely. Whenever I go to a meeting, I like to arrive early and stay late. I like the face-to-face sharing before and after the meetings. That way, I get to meet the new members and give them a warm welcome, a handshake, and a smile.

Both in and out of meetings, some of the promises the Big Book makes on pages 83 and 84 are beginning to come true. I found another one on page 100: "You . . . must walk day by day in the path of spiritual progress. If you persist, remarkable things will happen." I read things like that, and I keep hearing that it gets better and better the longer I stay sober, and I'm not kidding — if it gets much better, I'll bust! When I was sober two years, I was told, "You ain't seen nothin' yet!" Then, this month, after six glorious years of sobriety, one of my sponsors said, "You have barely scratched the surface!" All of the rewards that I'm receiving are much more than I'm giving. I'm so very grateful for Alcoholics Anonymous.

By looking into the Big Book daily, I am learning how to stay on that path that the first one hundred mem-

bers cleared for me. Whenever I get down in the dumps, or feeling low, I think of "Bill's Story," on page 15, when he was full of self-pity and resentment during his trying times: "When all other measures failed, work with another alcoholic would save the day."

One of the ways I stay active is on our local H&I (hospital and institution) committee of AA. We carry the message to those who are confined. When I share my story at a jail or hospital, I talk about how AA has helped me stay sober, how I couldn't do it alone. I read the beginning of Chapter 3 — they always seem to identify with that. In many cases, I've found people who want help and honestly don't want to drink any more. In our book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, on page 109, it says, "The joy of living is the theme of AA's Twelfth Step, and action is its keyword."

The Big Book's chapter "Working with Others" says (on page 89), "Carry this message to other alcoholics! . . . Life will take on new meaning. To watch people recover, to see them help others, to watch loneliness vanish, to see a fellowship grow up about you, to have a host of friends — this is an experience you must not miss." It is these things that keep me going back for more, because each one of them has happened before my eyes.

I see a lot of sick alcoholics just coming off one in detox centers. Most of them say that they have

tried AA but it didn't work for them. A doctor in AA told me to ask them, when they say that, if they have attended thirty consecutive AA meetings and at half of those gotten active with emptying ashtrays, stacking chairs, helping to clean up after the meeting, etc. Usually, that question rings a bell when I ask it at a meeting. Afterward, one man will come up to me and say he thinks that's the reason he slipped — he hadn't been active. "How can I help?" he will ask.

If you really want to get into action, and you have already taken Steps One, Two, and Three, and you honestly know that you should do Step Four, but you keep putting it off (the way I did), I suggest that you get moving right now. Open the Big Book and start at the bottom of page 63: "We launched out on a

course of vigorous action." For those who say, "Oh, I've taken the Steps": Turn to page 88, where it says, "But this is not all. There is action and more action." For me, that's what this program is all about. That's the magic *word—action!*

One of the best suggestions that I received early in my program, I'd like to pass on to others. I heard this from an old-timer in AA with lots of good sobriety. He held up four fingers and said, "AA is a simple program. There are four things you should do. One, put the plug in the jug. Two, go to plenty of AA meetings. Three, ask for help in the morning, and four, say thank-you at night." I'd like to add one more thing to that list to make it five: Get into action as soon as possible.

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